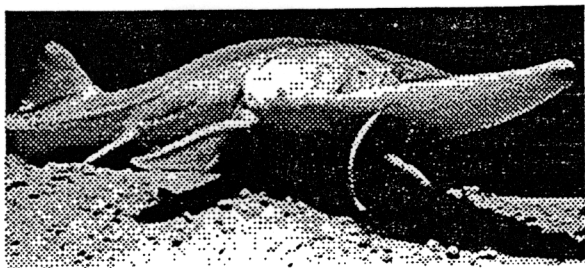


PALLID STURGEON

Scaphirhynchus albus



Official Status: Endangered

Endangered species are species that are in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. It is unlawful to kill, harm, or harass endangered species.

Listed: 55 Federal Register 36641; September 6, 1990.

Historical Status: Pallid sturgeon were not identified as a separate species until 1905. Because of that, the historical data are sparse. However, catch records indicate that pallid sturgeon were somewhat common as late as the 1950's and 1960's. Observation data from the Missouri River and its tributaries in the Dakotas and Montana reflect the downward trend of the population. In the 1960's, there was an average of 50 observations per year; in the 1970's, there was an average of 21 observations per year; and in the 1980's, there was an average of only 6 observations per year.

Present Status: Pallid sturgeon are found in the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and their larger tributaries. Total length of the historic range is approximately 3,550 river miles; however, only portions of this range are presently suitable pallid sturgeon habitat. In South Dakota, fishermen on the Missouri River occasionally catch pallid sturgeon. Although no reproduction has been documented in South Dakota in more than a decade, adults have been located below the Oahe and Fort Randall Dams in 1992.

Habitat: Pallid sturgeon are adapted for living close to the bottom of large, silty rivers with swift currents. The preferred habitat is comprised of sand flats and gravel bars.

Life History: Male pallid sturgeon do not appear to be sexually mature until they reach at least 5 to 7 years of age, and females do not appear to be sexually mature until they reach at least 15 to 20 years. Spawning occurs from June through July over gravel or other hard surfaces. The eggs take five to eight days to hatch. Both male and female sturgeon may go three to ten years between spawnings. Pallid sturgeon are long lived, with individuals reaching perhaps 50 years of age. Pallid sturgeon feed on aquatic insects, mollusks, and small fishes.

Aid To Identification: Pallid sturgeon are armored with lengthwise rows of bony plates and have a "shark-like" appearance. The range of the pallid sturgeon in South Dakota overlaps the range of the shovelnose sturgeon. Pallid sturgeon

can weigh up to 80 pounds, while shovelnose sturgeon reach a maximum weight of five pounds and average two pounds. The back and sides of the pallid sturgeon are grayish-white versus the brown color of the shovelnose sturgeon. The length of the inner barbels (four whisker-like appendages in front of the mouth) on a pallid are only about half as long as the outer barbels while, on the shovelnose, all barbels are the same length. Pallid sturgeons are known to hybridize with the smaller shovelnose sturgeon.

Reasons For Decline: Of the 3,550 river miles that the pallid sturgeon inhabits, all have been significantly affected by man. Approximately 28 percent of the affected area has been impounded, which has created unsuitable lake-like habitat, 51 percent of the area has been channelized, and the remaining 21 percent of the historic habitat is below dams. In the latter 21 percent, the water released from dams has reduced silt loads and caused different runoff patterns and colder temperatures, all of which are believed to be detrimental to pallid sturgeon. Commercial fishing may have also played a role in the pallid sturgeon's decline.

Recommendations: All species of sturgeon caught in South Dakota must be released immediately. Contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (605) 224-8693, or the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, (605) 773-4345, with information on any pallid sturgeon that you catch.

Comments: Pallid sturgeon are an ancient species of fish that was in existence long before the advent of man. Like other ancient fish, pallid sturgeon have a skeleton of cartilage rather than true bones. Sturgeon are the common source of caviar, although the pallid sturgeon was rarely used for this purpose.

References: The *Pallid Sturgeon Recovery Plan* is in preparation by the North Dakota State Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A *Pallid Sturgeon Recovery Update* is available from the same office (1500 Capitol Avenue, Bismarck, North Dakota 58501) (701-250-4491).



Present distribution of the pallid sturgeon.

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